

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 5303

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, MILL, AR

SUBJECT: CREATION OF PLANNING SECRETARIAT AND MILITARY COMMAND
CHANGES

1. LOCAL PRESS AND POLITICAL CIRCLES ARE OPENLY DISCUSSING GOA INTENTION IN NEAR FUTURE TO ESTABLISH A SECRETARIAT OF PLANNING AS MINISTERIAL-LEVEL POST REPORTING DIRECTLY TO PRESIDENT. MOST REPORTS AGREE THAT, IF CREATED, NEW OFFICE WOULD BE HEADED BY GENERAL ROMAN DIAZ BESSONE, AT PRESENT COMMANDER OF SECOND CORPS WITH HEADQUARTERS IN ROSARIO.

2. OTHER REPORTS AND PRESS SPECULATION HAVE IT THAT GENERAL VIOLA WILL IN EFFECT BECOME DEPUTY ARMY CINC AND TAKE OVER CERTAIN INSTITUTIONAL FUNCTIONS OF THE CINC HIMSELF, THUS FREEING PRESIDENT VIDELA FOR HIS GOVERNMENTAL DUTIES. THERE IS PRECEDENT (UNDER LANUSSE IN 1971) FOR LEAVING THE PRESIDENT IN TITULAR COMMAND OF ARMY BUT HANDING OVER MUCH OF THE ACTUAL DIRECTION TO A TRUSTED SUBORDINATE. ONE RUMOR EVEN HAS IT THAT VIDELA WILL RESIGN AS ARMY CINC AND BECOME FULL-TIME PRESIDENT, WITH VIOLA MOVING UP TO TAKE COMMAND OF ARMY IN NAME AS WELL AS FACT. ANOTHER RUMORED CHANGE HAS FIRST CORPS COMMANDER GEN CARLOS SUAREZ MASON MOVING INTO JOB AS ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF, A POSITION IN WHICH HE ALSO WOULD LOSE DIRECT COMMAND OF TROOPS AND COME UNDER CLOSER ATTENTION OF VIOLA. SUAREZ MASON'S KEY COMMAND, BASED IN BUENOS AIRES, WOULD, ACCORDING
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TO SPECULATION, GO TO GEN OSVALDO AZPITARTE, PRESENTLY

COMMANDER OF FIFTH CORPS IN BAHIA BLANCA. FINALLY, GEN CARLOS LAIDLAW (NOW DIRECTOR OF GENDARMERIA) WOULD TAKE OVER FIFTH CORPS AND GEN LEOPOLDO F. GALTIERI WOULD MOVE TO SECOND CORPS. BOTH HAVE REPUTATIONS AS NON-POLITICAL "PROFESSIONALISTS".

3. COMMENT: RUMOR THAT VIDELA WILL RESIGN AS ARMY CINC IS DOUBTLESS AN EXAGGERATION--OR EXTRAPOLATION. MANY FEEL THAT JUNTA SYSTEM IS NOT WORKING WELL, AND THAT VIDELA MUST ASSERT HIMSELF AND DEVOTE HIMSELF ON FULL-TIME BASIS TO PRESIDENCY. AT THIS POINT, HOWEVER, WISH IS PROBABLY FATHER TO RUMOR. VIDELA COULD NOT BREAK JUNTA SYSTEM WITHOUT MAKING MORE WAVES THAN HE IS PROBABLY PREPARED TO RIDE OUT JUST NOW--THOUGH THIS IS NOT TO SAY HE MIGHT NOT HAVE IT IN MIND FOR A LATER DATE.

4. IF IMPLEMENTED MORE OR LESS AS NOW EXPECTED, PROJECTED COMMAND SHIFTS MIGHT BE EXPLAINED AS MATTER OF VIDELA KILLING TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE. FIRST, IF DIAZ BESSONE AND SUAREZ MASON ARE BOTH MOVED FROM TROOP COMMANDS TO STAFF JOBS (WHERE THEY WOULD BE UNDER CLOSER SUPERVISION OF VIDELA AND VIOLA) THAT WOULD LEAVE IN MAJOR TROOP COMMAND ONLY ONE OF GENERALS WHO WERE ORIGINALLY SEEN AS POSSIBLE CHALLENGERS TO VIDELA--GENERAL BENJAMIN MENENDEZ OF THIRD CORPS IN CORDOBA. BUT MENENDEZ, WHILE PERHAPS MORE INFLEXIBLE THAN VIDELA AND VIOLA, IS NOT A THREAT TO THEM. ON CONTRARY, REPORTS ARE THAT HE SWUNG OVER TO THEIR CAMP SEVERAL WEEKS AGO (ONE FACT PERHAPS BEING THAT HIS SON IS MARRYING GEN VILLAREAL'S DAUGHTER-- VILLAREAL BEING THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE PRESIDENCY AND A KEY VIDELA SUPPORTER). THUS, THE PROJECTED CHANGES WOULD LEAVE VIDELA-VIOLA LINE IN A STRENGTHENED POSITION. INDEED, THERE ARE THOSE WHO ARE INTERPRETING CHANGES AS OPENING OF CAMPAIGN ON VIDELA'S PART TO CONSOLIDATE HIS POSITION.

5. SECONDLY, VIDELA MAY SEE CREATION OF PLANNING SECRETARIAT AS STEP IN DIRECTION OF BRINGING MORE ORDER TO GOVERNMENT WHICH HAS SUFFERED SINCE MARCH 24 FROM LACK OF COORDINATION AMONG ITS VARIOUS MINISTRIES AND FROM LACK OF GENERAL POLICY DIRECTION. NEW SECRETARIAT MIGHT PROVIDE CONSIDERABLY MORE COORDINATION AND REVIEW AT TOP THAN HAS HERETOFORE BEEN THE CASE. IT MIGHT ALSO ASSIST JUNTA IN DRAFTING POLICY GUIDELINES TO PROVIDE FOR THE MUCH-DISCUSSED "POLITICAL DEFINITION".
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6. BASED ON HIS EXPERIENCE AND PERSONAL INTERESTS, DIAZ BESSONE IS LOGICAL OFFICER TO HEAD UP NEW SECRETARIAT. UNDER ONGANIA GOVERNMENT THEN LT COL DIAZ BESSONE PREPARED A PLANNING STUDY FOR THE GOVERNMENT AND HE HAS SPONSORED AS A PRIVATE INITIATIVE FROM HIS HEADQUARTERS IN ROSARIO A "THINK TANK" STUDY GROUP KNOWN AS "ARGENTINA 2000" (SEE US DAO IR 6804019976).

7. OBSERVERS WHO PLACE MORE EMPHASIS ON DIVISIONS WITHIN GOVERNMENT WILL STRESS POLITICAL ASPECTS OF COMMAND CHANGES. THOSE WHO EMPHASIZE COHESION OF GOVERNMENT WILL STRESS "NORMALCY" OF CHANGES. AS VIDELA HIMSELF PROBABLY SEES THEM, PROJECTED CHANGES, PARTICULARLY CREATION OF PLANNING SECRETARIAT AND APPOINTMENT OF DIAZ BESSONE TO HEAD IT, ARE AT ONCE POLITICALLY EXPEDIENT AND BUREAUCRATICALLY SOUND. WHETHER THEY WILL IN FACT, HOWEVER, GIVE HIM BEST OF BOTH WORLDS IS VERY MUCH OPEN TO DOUBT. WHAT IS NEEDED IS STRONGER LEADERSHIP AT TOP AND MORE CLEARLY DRAWN LINES OF COMMAND, NOT ANOTHER BUREAUCRATIC LAYER. FURTHER, WHETHER PLANS THAT DIAZ BESSONE MIGHT COME UP WITH WOULD BE COMPATIBLE WITH VIDELA-VIOLA VERSION OF ARGENTINE FUTURE IS ALSO QUESTIONABLE. LASTLY, AND POTENTIALLY PERHAPS MOST DISTURBING, IS QUESTION OF THE PROJECTED SECRETARIAT'S PARAMETERS WITH RESPECT TO THE ECONOMIC PROGRAM. CLEARLY, IF IT IS TO HAVE A HAND IN ECONOMIC PLANNING AND DIRECTION, ITS CREATION MAY CAUSE MORE CONFUSION THAN IT DISPELS. MARTINEZ DE HOZ HAS ENOUGH PROBLEMS AS IT IS WITHOUT HAVING TO SHARE COMMAND WITH DIAZ BESSONE. IN SUM, AS A STEP AIMED AT CONSOLIDATING POWER, PROJECTED CHANGES MAKE A GOOD DEAL OF SENSE. WHETHER CREATION OF PLANNING SECRETARIAT IS BUREAUCRATICALLY SOUND, HOWEVER, REMAINS TO BE SEEN.

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